



Dog is My Co-Pilot ... TouchPoint for February 20, 2019

Luke 6:27-38 (MSG)

"To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life.

No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

"Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that's charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that.

"I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind.

"Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you" The upending continues. It is a major factor in Luke's gospel. The presence of Christ in the world wreaks havoc on the world's ways. When Mary is pregnant with Jesus, she proclaims that the low will be raised up and the powerful will be taken down from their thrones.

When Jesus shows up in his hometown and reads from Isaiah, and refuses to do miracles amongst them but says he has come to the poor and those outside their boundaries, they seek to throw him off a cliff. Last week he spoke that those who weep will laugh and those who are laughing will weep. For Luke, the ways of the Kingdom of Heaven are different from, and opposed to, the ways of the world.

Today the upending continues: *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you... Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you."* This passage says that the only way to end the cycle of hatred, violence and abuse in our world is to break the cycle. One does not, one can not, end the cycle of hatred, violence and abuse by being better at it than the other person or the other society or the other country.

Now let me go off on a little tangent here lest someone get the wrong idea. This phrase, *"Pray for those who abuse you"* cannot be used to justify or encourage one who is abused, to stay in an abusive relationship. If you are in an abusive relationship, **"GET OUT"**! One does not stop abuse by staying in an abusive relationship and/or being abusive back. One stops abuse by getting out of an abusive relationship. And if it is possible for you to do it, pray that the abuser will find help and healing and cease the abusing of others.

What Jesus is talking about here is not a toleration of the brokenness of society, but a breaking of the cycle of brokenness. A breaking of the brokenness, if you will. Or in other words, a healing of it. If we are going to make a difference in society, we have to be different from society.

Let me repeat that. If we are going to make a difference in society, we have to be different from society. We don't change society by embodying the values of society. We don't change society by being better at society's values than the rest of society. We make a difference in society by being different from society. By the way, these words of Jesus and his living them out got him killed. In case you didn't know how the story ends.

Jesus speaks of these ways as the way of the kingdom. They are more descriptive than prescriptive. We can't turn them into new commandments that, if we just follow them, then all will be well with us. They can't be the new way of saying, "If I just live this way here (on earth), then I will be able to go there (Heaven)."

Yes, Jesus says, for 'your reward will be great' but the line just before this is, "Don't do things expecting anything in return." It's absurd to say to yourself, "I will do things, not expecting anything in return, so I will be rewarded." That's an oxymoron. Or just a moron.

If we turn this whole passage into just another 'If – then' sentence: "If I just live this way here, then I will be able to go there" then we are doing exactly what Jesus says not to do.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that?" "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that?" "If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that? Even sinners lend to sinners."

Substitute the word 'God' for the word 'those' and it's still the same. If the only reason you love God is because you think God "is a good deal" you've missed the point. You would think that would be obvious by the fact that the primary symbol of our faith is a cross. Even Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane asked the Father if there wasn't another deal on the table. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Jesus wasn't seeing this as a good deal.

Or think of Jesus words as he flips the tables in the temple, "Do not make my Father's house a marketplace" which is a place of deal making. "If I just live this way here (on earth), then I will be able to go there (Heaven)." "If – then" sentences are not a part of the kingdom of Heaven, whether they are lived out in relation to others or God or God's relationship to us.

Look, if God only loves those who love God back, how is God any different from the sinners Jesus condemns in this passage?

The destructive "If – then" ways of the world are not made holy by spiritualizing them. And finally, the words, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned" are not ways to sneak an "If – then" world in through the back door. They are simply a way to say that judgement and condemnation are not at the heart of the kingdom of heaven.

"Forgive, and you will be forgiven" is not putting a new contingency on the Mystery's forgiveness. If forgiveness requires a pre-existing contingency, it is not forgiveness.

Look, if these are the new commandments of the Kingdom; if this is the new "If you behave here then you can get there" by which God operates, then I am done. I am finished. I may as well call it quits cuz I got no hope.

The pain of reading these words is that they hold a mirror up to my life and I am a miserable failure. And it doesn't matter one bit if I am a little bit better at these things than some others. God is not a giant bear who is chasing us and all I have to be is a little faster, a little better than whomever I am with.

When I look at this passage and see it as prescriptive I got no hope. But if it is descriptive, then I find my salvation in this: *"For the Most High is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked."* Because in comparison to those on this list who turn the other cheek and give to everyone who begs, 'ungrateful and wicked' would be a diplomatic way of describing me. The only hope for me, is to experience the *"Father who is merciful"*– *"Who is kind to the ungrateful and wicked"*

The only way for me to break my cycle of 'ungratefulness' and 'wickedness' is to encounter the One who broke that cycle by turning the other cheek. Who prayed for you and me as we abused him on the cross. Who gave without expecting anything in return. And who ultimately did not judge and condemn us in our ungratefulness and wickedness. But prayed "Father, forgive them" from the cross and uttered "Peace be with you" from the empty tomb.

God isn't a good deal. God just is.

And what God is – is love, forgiveness, and mercy. Which at times is a great experience of healing and wholeness, but at other times can leave you run over by the world, crucified by the world.

Look, It's not about getting from here to there. It's about getting 'there' here. It's about getting 'there' (the Kingdom of Heaven), here. It's not what we need to do to get to the Kingdom of Heaven. It's how does one live and participate in the Kingdom of Heaven 'Here and Now.' How do we live out the future of creation which will culminate in the Kingdom of Heaven? How do we live out the future of creation 'Here and Now' in the creation? It's not about getting from here to there. It's about living in the 'there' here and now. Is that making any sense? Let me try to get at this idea of not getting from 'here' to 'there' but having the 'there' come 'here' from a slightly different angle. Maybe this will work. Maybe it won't. But when has not making sense ever stopped me before.

My niece, Melissa, who is also my goddaughter, had a good friend whose dog died, recently. My brother Craig, Melissa's dad, asked me if we could work together on something for Melissa to send to her friend on the death of her dog. This is what we came up with and I think it speaks to upending our "here to there" mindset.

To my Friend:

On the Death of Her Dog, Bixby

They say, "All dogs go to heaven." That's not true, you know All dogs do not go to heaven.

Dogs bring heaven to us. Dogs are heaven.

With their unconditional love and acceptance of us. With their utter joy and celebration of life. With their oneness with us in their feelings and presence and heart.

Dogs bring heaven to us. Dogs are heaven.

Dogs are the saints of God on earth. And by 'saints' I don't mean those who are above it all and better than it all. No, by 'saints' I mean those who live in the midst of life, with all its pains and sorrows and still find a reason to celebrate.

Dogs celebrate and live life without pretense. Heck, they lick themselves right in front of you. If that isn't living and celebrating life without pretense I don't know what is.

Dogs celebrate you without pretense as well. Dogs celebrate you for being you. They celebrate you for simply walking in the door. What can be 'holier' than that?

Dogs bring heaven to us. Dogs are heaven.

And that's why losing a dog feels like HELL. Celebration, joy and unconditional love are gone. You feel separated, dis-connected and dis-membered from them.

It hurts and there is nothing that can make it better in the moment.

All I can tell you is to hold on to the memories. Re-connect, re-member yourself to those times of love, grace and joy your dog brought you.

And finally, celebrate. Celebrate, not that "All dogs go to heaven."

But celebrate that your dog brought heaven to you.

I love you like a dog, (like Bixby),

Melissa

You see, dogs don't live by "if – then." They don't wait to see if you're a good deal or not. They bring heaven to you and me and show kindness to the ungrateful and the wicked. Dogs live in a "because–therefore" world. "Because you exist, therefore they love you."

To live within a dog's world is to get a glimpse into the Kingdom of heaven, here and now.

Maybe that sarcastic bumper sticker isn't that far off.

Maybe ... "Dog is my co-pilot."

Amen.